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THE DATING OF THE SYNOPTIC GOSPELS*

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The question of the date of the Synoptic Gospels is one of much importance for the student of Christian origins. These records are the chief sources of our information regarding the life and ministry of Jesus. Obviously it is not possible for us to rest content until we have discovered so far as may be whether they are in any sense contemporary documents, or whether they are the products of a later generation.

The significance of this chronological question should not be gauged by the scant attention that is often bestowed upon it by New Testament scholars. Their apparent neglect is not due to failure to realize its importance, but rather to the paucity of clear and unmistakable data from which to deduce a trustworthy conclusion. For this reason, more than for any other, treatises on New Testament Introduction are as a rule extremely meager and unsatisfactory at this particular point. That this should continue to be the case may seem somewhat strange in view of the fact that we are in possession not of a single, isolated booklet, but of three related and by no means brief writings. With material of such variety and extent at our disposal, it might be expected that the question of date would have been definitely determined long since. It is, of course, true that some factors in the problem have been settled in a broad and general way. For example, it is widely agreed (1) that our written gospels proceed ultimately from oral tradition; (2) that the language of this primitive tradition was Aramaic; and (3) that the transmutation of this oral Aramaic tradition into the Greek Gospels that have come down to us must have taken place, at the latest, within a period of some seventy or eighty years after the crucifixion.

The measurably widespread unanimity in these conclusions, however, falls very far short of giving us a satisfactory solution

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of the entire problem. For, unlike so many questions in Old Testament criticism, a brief interval of time is here a matter of much importance. A difference of fifty, or even of thirty years, may result in carrying us out of the days of the apostles' activity to the age of their successors, from those who could speak from experience to those who were entirely dependent upon tradition.

It will be found upon examination that previous efforts to determine the dates of the synoptical writers have moved out along one or more of four distinct lines: (1) external evidence for the existence and use of the gospels; (2) ancient traditions regarding their origin; (3) the study of their mutual interrelationship and of the historical allusions which they are thought to contain; and finally (4) their relation to the Book of Acts.

I

As for the first of these points,—external testimony—it gives us most welcome protection against extravagant views, but fails to yield data for any exact determination. It is somewhat surprising that outside the historical books themselves there are no allusions in the New Testament to written records of Jesus' life. Further, Bishop Westcott did not hesitate to say that “no evangelic reference in the Apostolic Fathers can be referred certainly to a written record.” This judgment is of course challenged by many eminent authorities, but at best we can hardly claim more than the possible indication of the use of written records by 110 A. D. We are on more certain ground when we come to Justin Martyr, Marcion, the Papias Fragments, the Muratorian Canon and to the unquestioned testimony of Irenaeus. But valuable as all this is for other purposes, it avails little in our present quest.

II

Tradition affords more important assistance. Unfortunately, however, the earliest and, consequently, the most valuable recorded memories contain very little that is at all definite or unambiguous regarding the time when the Gospels were written. The oldest and most important statement is the oft quoted passage from Eusebius which reports the testimony of Papias. This Father, who was Bishop of Hierapolis in Phrygia and who may

have written about the middle of the second century or even earlier, gives a tradition with which he had evidently been long familiar and which may well represent what was widely believed in Christian circles at the opening of that second century. He states that from a presbyter or elder of his acquaintance he had learned that Mark was Peter's interpreter and that he wrote accurately, though not in order, whatsoever he remembered of the things that were either said or done by the Messiah. For he neither heard the Lord nor did he follow him but afterwards he attended Peter who adapted his teachings to practical needs, but without making any orderly arrangements of the Lord's sayings. Papias adds that Mark did no wrong in thus writing some things as he remembered them, for he was careful neither to omit anything that he had heard nor to set down any false statement. Of Matthew he says that he composed the oracles in the Hebrew language and that each one interpreted them as he could (Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.*, iii. 39).

It is evident that Papias' main concern is to authenticate the contents of the Gospels by establishing a direct connection between them and apostolic testimony. He is not thinking particularly as to when the narratives were actually written. The most that we can infer is that, at the time in question, Mark was definitely, and perhaps finally, separated from Peter, and that there was no further opportunity to consult with him. The whole mode of statement leaves the impression that the second gospel was thought of as coming from a period when relationship to the apostle was altogether a thing of the past.

Much the same is likewise true of the later witness of Irenaeus, who, as regards the first and second gospels, may be only reporting in amplified form what he had found in Papias. He writes as follows:

“Matthew then among the Hebrews put forth (also) a gospel in their own tongue while Peter and Paul were preaching in Rome and founding the church. Moreover after their decease (or departure) Mark, the disciple and interpreter of Peter, himself also has handed down to us in writing the things that were preached by Peter. Moreover, Luke, also, the companion of Paul, put down in a book the gospel preached by him” (*Adv. Haer.*, III, 11, 8). A new study of these words made some years since by Rev. John Chapman resulted in the conclusion that

Irenaeus does not intend to affirm that Matthew wrote at the time when Peter and Paul were preaching in Rome, but only that, whereas Matthew published a gospel among the Hebrews besides preaching it, Peter and Paul preached their message without writing it. However, their testimony was not lost because it has been handed on in written form by Mark and Luke respectively. Accordingly while there is here no statement as to when Mark's gospel was actually composed, the evident implication is that Peter's preaching was preserved after his death by having been written down by Mark before that time (*Journal of Theological Studies*, VI, 563-569). In this manner Chapman is able to bring the statements of Irenaeus into harmony with an Alexandrian tradition which we first meet in Clement of Alexandria at the end of the second century and which was accepted by other Fathers, to the effect that Mark wrote at Rome during the lifetime of Peter. Clement tells us that his authorities for this information were presbyters or elders from whom he learned further that the gospels with the genealogies were written first, meaning presumably that Matthew and Luke preceded Mark. (Chapman would say preceded John.) Without pursuing this topic of tradition further, it may be said that clear and decisive evidence for an exact dating of the Synoptic Gospels is probably not to be expected in this quarter.

III

Accordingly it is to the writings themselves that we must turn for our surest indication of the time of their origin. As might be anticipated, the idea of carrying on such an investigation did not emerge until the dawn of the modern era of critical study in the eighteenth century. So long as the gospels were thought of as representing eternal types of divine truth, dates could have little significance. Under such circumstances the matter of actual writing and of mutual relationship could hardly become a subject of serious reflection. There was, to be sure, a certain open-mindedness regarding critical questions on the part of some of the early Church Fathers, notably Augustine, but this scholarly outlook was speedily dimmed by a rigid theory of inspiration that took away every incentive for scientific research. The same thing continued to be true at a much later period, when theologians, both Roman and Reformed, were concerned chiefly

with smoothing away difficulties and eliminating seeming conflicts between parallel accounts. When in the eighteenth century questions of origin and relationship at last began to receive serious consideration, new interest was given to such discussions by the publication of the Wolfenbüttel Fragments and particularly by the one entitled "Vom Zwecke Jesu und seiner Jünger," which appeared in 1778. In this same year Lessing, who had given out the Fragments, propounded a theory as to the origin of the gospels that was destined to exercise an important influence upon subsequent investigation. It was his belief that our Synoptists are all dependent upon an original Semitic gospel. This suggestion was speedily taken up and worked out with various modifications by Eichhorn, unfortunately without due acknowledgment of indebtedness. Thus it has come about that the hypothesis of the evolution of our present Synoptic Gospels from a primitive written gospel is associated particularly with Eichhorn's name. He believed that an original Aramaic gospel, written by a disciple of the apostles possibly as early as 35, was variously recast during the next twenty-five years, first in Aramaic and then in Greek. From this original there came a large number of evangelical writings, and out of these our present gospels emerged and were accepted by the Church toward the end of the second century.

While this theory of a primitive written gospel was under discussion, a competing hypothesis which advocated a close inter-relationship between the gospels was being elaborated. This has come to be associated especially with the name of Griesbach, to whom perhaps more than to any other scholar belongs the credit for placing Synoptic investigation upon a scientific basis. The idea, however, that one synoptist had borrowed from another was by no means new. It had been suggested by Augustine about the year 400. This Father found no difficulty in assuming that Mark was consciously dependent upon Matthew, but he did not at all realize the consequences that would logically follow from such an important observation.

The hypothesis of mutual dependence seeks to solve the Synoptic problem for the most part on the basis of the documents as they now lie before us. Griesbach supposed that Matthew wrote his gospel in Greek from his own knowledge of the facts. This gospel was in turn known to Luke and used by

him to supplement the information gained from oral tradition, whereas Mark came last of all and compiled his narrative mainly from Matthew, but not without some dependence upon Luke. In this way a compendium was prepared for readers who were unacquainted with Jewish conditions and views. Mark's own additions, however, prove that he was familiar with Jerusalem, and was in a position to add vivid touches. Other advocates of this theory have postulated a different sequence for the evangelical writers, but usually there is a tendency to date the present gospels earlier than is done by the adherents of the previous hypothesis. Griesbach's conclusion as to the secondary character of Mark and as to its relatively late date has continued to reappear at intervals during the last one hundred years.

Still another proposal for explaining the relationship between the Synoptic Gospels received its classic formulation during the selfsame years of the early nineteenth century. Gieseler developed the theory that our gospels proceed not from written sources, but that they arose in dependence upon an oral gospel which very early took on a more or less fixed and ordered form. He believed that when this gospel passed out from Palestine it necessarily assumed a Greek dress, but that even then the need for writing would perhaps first be felt during the period of conflict with heretical teachers.

The decade of the thirties in the last century proved to be an extremely important epoch for synoptic study. By this time the three hypotheses mentioned above had been fully developed, and all was in readiness for a fresh advance. At this juncture (1832) Schleiermacher pointed out that the Matthew of which Papias spoke, and which he said was written in Hebrew, must be distinguished from our first canonical gospel, which can only be regarded as a later rescension of this earlier work. In the same way he believed that the Mark of Papias was less complete, less well ordered, than our present gospel. His contention regarding Matthew has continued to find increasing favor, whereas his conclusion regarding Mark was soon disproved, first by Lachmann, three years later (1835), who maintained successfully that of the present Synoptic Gospels the best ordered historical tradition is to be found in Mark. Presently (1838) Weisse went still further in showing that Papias' allusion could apply to our second gospel as we have it and must be

understood as referring to this document. This position was defended in the same year by Wilke, who in a voluminous work espoused the priority of Mark on the basis of literary relationship. He directed especial attention to the style of the evangelists and to the particular motives that were traceable in each. Weisse believed that besides Mark a collection of Jesus' sayings had been used by the authors of the first and the third gospels, and thus the modern Two Source Theory emerged in its full form. Meanwhile Strauss in 1835 so developed the oral hypothesis as to make the gospels to be in large measure the late products of a myth-forming ecclesiastical consciousness.

The fresh stimulus that was given to New Testament study through the rise of the Tübingen school promised for a time to work a marked change in opinion as to the dates of the Synoptic Gospels. There were indications that they were to be swept away from their old moorings and carried far down into the second century. Mark was looked upon by Baur as the latest of the Synoptists, while Luke was regarded not as the source of Marcion's Gospel but as a Catholicized version of the same, composed about the middle of the second century. Matthew, the oldest of the Synoptists, was believed to be the outcome of a long process of literary development and was held to have attained its present form during the Jewish rebellion under Hadrian.

These extreme conclusions were soon considerably modified by the adherents of the Tübingen school itself. First of all Luke was restored to his rightful position, and Marcion was made to be dependent upon him. Then Mark was given his accustomed place between Matthew and Luke, or was even made to be the earliest gospel (Volkmar and Ritschl). Hilgenfeld, a distinguished member of the Tübingen school, so far departed from the original positions of Baur as to bring back Matthew and Mark into the first century and to date Luke from 100 to 110.

The effect of the Tübingen movement outside its own immediate circle was to call forth a re-affirmation and recombination of the several hypotheses that have already been reviewed. Meanwhile notable progress was made in the recognition of the priority of the second gospel and in the increasing acceptance of the theory that our three Synoptists rest upon two main written sources, one of which was the canonical Mark, or a

document substantially identical therewith. During the remaining years of the century one can trace a growing unanimity in these conclusions, as well as in the belief that all three Synoptic Gospels were written during the last thirty years of the first century, although a few scholars still continued to keep the first decade of the second open for Matthew and Luke.

In the present century we are witnessing important developments in Synoptic study that have a very direct bearing upon the question of date. In some ways the activity of the last ten years has a striking resemblance to what was taking place eighty years ago. Once more the time seems to have come for the taking up of new problems and the retesting of old conclusions. Up to 1901 few believers in the priority of Mark had been inclined to make him depend upon written sources, not, at least, aside from the apocalyptic section in the thirteenth chapter, and there was no general agreement that it was necessary to do so even here. It is true that for fifty years Bernhard Weiss had steadfastly asserted Mark's dependence upon an earlier discourse source and that Prof. Wendt of Jena had for some time advanced the theory that the second evangelist made use of several independent documents representing distinct groups of Petrine tradition, and that the late Prof. von Soden felt that a Petrine source could be separated from later material. On the other hand, such scholars as Jülicher and Wernle in their widely used books defended the essential unity and originality of Mark as regards written sources, and Prof. Schmiedel, in his famous *Encyclopaedia Britannica* article, gave it as his opinion in 1901 that the use of such sources in Mark could not be raised above the level of conjecture except at a few points.

In that very year, however, a book appeared that impelled New Testament workers to investigate afresh the historical character and origin of this gospel. I refer to Wrede's "*Das Messiasgeheimnis in den Evangelien*" (1901). One of its first results was to hasten the publication of "*Das Älteste Evangelium*" by Johannes Weiss. In this book it is maintained that while Mark represents the earliest attempt to present the Apostolic gospel in the form of a narrative of Jesus' life, and while it must be dated from 64 to 67, still it affords clear evidence of being based on traditions that had already to some extent assumed written form. In the same year in which Weiss's

monograph appeared, Wellhausen began the publication of a series of compact little volumes on the gospels, that have attracted wide attention. His position is characterized by a particularly high estimate of Mark. This writing he believes owes its preservation to the sanctity that had come to attach to it by reason of its age. Otherwise it would have disappeared when the other Synoptic Gospels, which were more to the mind of the times, came into existence. Its narrative material gives evidence of having taken shape after a considerable course from mouth to mouth and was probably first written down in Aramaic at Jerusalem. Wellhausen thinks that there are sections in the gospel that are secondary as regards their historical character, but he doubts whether it is possible to carry out any literary analysis or trace stages of revision.

At that very time, however, this task was being undertaken by Wendling in a novel and very elaborate manner (1905, 1908). A little later Loisy worked out a different analysis in the two stout volumes of his commentary, while Prof. Bacon quite independently undertook the same task in his briefer work entitled "The Beginnings of Gospel History." Both these latter writers agree that the final edition of the gospel is to be put shortly after the year 70.

Possibly Wellhausen's greatest service to synoptic study was the setting forth in a manner that was altogether new of the evidence for the Palestinian and Aramaic background for our Synoptic Gospels. Resch and Dr. E. A. Abbott had for some time previously been seeking to establish the existence of an original Hebrew document back of our first three gospels, and others had championed similar theories. But their work was not influencing opinion to any marked degree. Dalman's "Worte Jesu" left the situation largely unchanged. So much was this true that it was possible for Wernle to say at the close of the last century that the evidences of an Aramaic original in the Synoptic Gospels were negligible, and at the opening of the new century Schmiedel could still claim that the evidence in Mark sufficed only to show "that he wrote a kind of Jewish Greek that he had derived from reading the LXX." The fuller knowledge of the Koinē Greek that had come through the study of papyrus fragments of early date seemed to corroborate this conclusion. Prof. Wellhausen, however, interposed his

veto, and he has been sustained by subsequent publications from other eminent Semitic scholars. He bases his view not so much on single phrases and isolated examples as upon a combination of facts that prove the presence of an underlying Semitic syntax and style. He admits that this might possibly come through oral tradition but believes that it can be better understood as resulting from the use of a written document. Thus what had often been conjectured in the past was at last given a really scientific standing. It will be a distinct advance in synoptic study if it shall be possible, as I believe it eventually will, to add to the fact of Mark's priority the no less certain conclusion of his dependence on or use of Aramaic sources. The theory of an early date for this gospel will naturally be favored by such a consideration.

IV

Up to the present it may be said that the dates of the Synop-
tists have been determined as a rule in the first instance by
theories regarding their origin, and secondly, on the ground of
internal evidence. In the latter case most reliance has usually
been put upon allusions in the apocalyptic sections that seem
to presuppose the fall of Jerusalem and the end of the Jewish
state. Such items of evidence are, however, always beset by the
difficulty that the sections in question are largely couched in
the ambiguous language of older prophecy. Again, it is not
easy to make out a clear and convincing case if one puts his
dependence upon single isolated passages that are supposed to
mirror the life and practice of later days. No more can this be
done when the conclusion is grounded upon such general con-
siderations as the supposed Paulinism of Mark or, in the case
of the other gospels, the supposed evidence for the presence
of a spirit and atmosphere that could be found only in the post-
Apostolic age. Under these circumstances it is not strange that
the most notable contributions to the discussion of synoptic
dates have come of late from those who put their chief reliance
upon the data afforded by the Book of Acts. It is evident that
if assured conclusions can be attained here, our problem will be
largely solved so far as a *terminus ad quem* is concerned, since
Acts was certainly written later than the third gospel and in
all probability later than Matthew. Some surprising deductions

have resulted from the following out of this line of research during the last six years.

Just when Moffatt was writing in his New Testament Introduction "that the roots of the historical literature (of the New Testament) lie in the same period with the correspondence of Paul, though the flowers bloom side by side with the later homilies," Harnack was penning the last lines of his small volume entitled "Neue Untersuchungen zur Apostelgeschichte und zur Abfassungszeit der Synoptischen Evangelien," in which all the gospel literature, blade, ear and full grain in the ear, is carried back into the period prior to the destruction of Jerusalem. That is to say, it is his belief that, whereas Matthew may have been written shortly after or before this event, the other Synoptic Gospels antedate the death of Paul.

In England, at about the same time, Archdeacon Allen maintained a like theory for Luke-Acts and a still earlier date than Harnack's for Mark and Matthew. Meanwhile here in America Prof. Torrey was engaged in studies that have resulted thus far in two publications, one being a monograph issued last year, in which he advocates 64 as the date of Acts and 60, or sometime prior to 61, for the third gospel. (*Harvard Theological Studies*, I. "The Composition and Date of Acts," Harvard University Press, 1916.)

In themselves such views are by no means without precedent, but they possess an entirely new importance because of the scholarly investigations of which they are the direct outcome and by reason of the fact that in the case of the Book of Acts two distinct lines of approach converge toward the same goal. Harnack in his earlier writings continued to assign Acts to the reign of Titus or the opening years of Domitian, but in 1911, not without some previous intimation that a change was impending, he carried it back to the closing days of Paul's Roman imprisonment. Our present purpose requires only that we should note the consequences of this decision for synoptic chronology. Once Harnack felt that Luke's prologue, with its reference to many predecessors in the field of evangelical history, demanded that at least fifty years must have elapsed since the crucifixion. He now believes that thirty-three would answer equally well. Only two difficulties of any moment seem to him to hinder an early dating of Mark and Luke, namely, the supposed allusions

to the destruction of Jerusalem in the eschatological chapters and the legendary developments in the accounts of the resurrection and ascension. As for the first, he now doubts whether any passage goes beyond an announcement of what is impending, and as for the second difficulty, he is convinced that divergent accounts of the resurrection appearances may well have had their origin in an early period, indeed that they can be better explained on such a basis. Harnack feels the further necessity of bringing his conclusions into accord with the earliest tradition regarding the origin of the gospels. This he is enabled to do by accepting Rev. John Chapman's interpretation of Irenaeus, which makes that Father give no information as to when the Synoptic Gospels were written. In this manner all hindrances to the dating of Mark in the sixth decade and the Discourse Source about 50, or earlier, are removed.

At first Harnack's revolutionary reconstruction was looked upon by many as a *jeu d'esprit*, and doubtless is so regarded still by not a few. Especially is this true of his efforts to remove the ancient landmarks for the Book of Acts. By Archdeacon Allen, on the other hand, the pronouncement was welcomed as confirming views to which this scholar was already advancing in his own study. As has been stated, he outdoes Harnack in the early dating of Matthew, and consequently of Mark as well. Abandoning the view that he had advocated in earlier editions of his commentary on Matthew, he now makes that gospel represent the Jewish Christian standpoint of 49-50, the period of the controversy in Antioch regarding the admission of the Gentiles into the church. In this way one of Matthew's main sources is carried back into the fifth decade, or more specifically to Jerusalem shortly after Peter's release from prison in 44. The Aramaic original of this primary document, he believes, may have been translated within a few years into Greek, possibly at Antioch, by the original author of the gospel, who may have subsequently issued a new edition of the same at Rome.

Prof. Torrey in his published work on the gospels has thus far concerned himself chiefly with Luke's use of Semitic sources, and more especially with the theory that an Aramaic source, written in Palestine in 49 or early 50 after the Council at Jerusalem, has been employed in Acts 1-15. He supposes our

present Book of Acts to have been composed in Rome in 64, while the Gospel of Luke may have been written in 60, on the basis of material gathered by that evangelist while Paul was kept prisoner at Caesarea. Torrey anticipates two objections to his conclusions that seem to call for refutation. The first is the one already touched upon in speaking of the view of Harnack, namely, Luke's supposed allusion to the destruction of Jerusalem (21:20-24). It is replied that nothing here goes beyond the predictions of the Old Testament (for example, Zech. 14:1 ff.; Dan. 7:25 and 12:1, 7) and Jerusalem's previous experiences with besieging Roman armies. The second is the not infrequent contention that Luke knew and used the Antiquities of Josephus, a work which cannot have been written earlier than 93 or 94. Torrey shows anew in a concise but convincing way that such a conclusion is unfounded.

V

It will appear from this recapitulation that two lines of investigation have come to the front in synoptic study which promise to have a very immediate and a very vital bearing upon the dates of the gospels. The use of Semitic sources in the first three gospels has been established with a degree of certainty that had not been previously attained, and this in itself is a matter of first importance. Hardly less significant is the weighty setting forth in an entirely new way of the case for the early date of Acts. If these recent advances can be maintained against counter attacks, what further readjustment will be necessary? Without attempting to estimate the value of the detailed arguments touching Acts, we may go on and ask what are some of the important consequences that would result from such an early dating of the Synoptic literature? To raise this question is to suggest grave difficulties that may not be insuperable but that as yet have not been removed.

(1) In the first place, it is evident that an entirely new appraisal and new interpretation of the events of the apostolic age will be demanded. We have become accustomed to the assumption that there was little disposition during apostolic days to draw up written records of the life and teaching of Jesus and that no real motive for doing so could exist until one by one the apostles and other living witnesses began to drop away.

How often has it been reiterated in standard treatises that the lively expectation of the Parousia made the early Christians indifferent to historical records! Such a need, it is said, could only be felt with the rise of a new generation that was less influenced by these ardent expectations. Accordingly the years from 30 to 60 are ordinarily held to have been in large measure an era of oral tradition. How essentially changed is the situation if we are to project back into this very period all the literary activity to which Luke's prologue bears witness, and if we are to establish there, not only his unknown sources of greater or less extent, but at least one known source, namely, our Gospel of Mark! And not only will this be true, but Matthew must be put back into the same period, unless we are of the number of those who believe him to be the latest of the Synoptists. Ramsay's hypothesis of a discourse source written before the crucifixion may not hereafter appear to be so much of an exaggeration. If the gospel literature did indeed arise in the apostolic age, and if it had its beginning so early in that period, then the first Christians were not so devoid of historical interest and literary ability as has been commonly assumed. They must rather have possessed far more of such historical appreciation and much greater capacity for literary production than we have imagined. Their expectation of Christ's speedy return did not have the supposed effect of making them indifferent to the events of his earthly ministry. On the other hand, they must very early have felt the importance of carefully chronicling all these things, possibly not so much for their own edification as for the use of converts who should be added to their number.

(2) Then secondly, the question of Paul's knowledge of written or oral evangelical tradition and of his attitude toward it is also raised anew. That the allusions in his writings to the ministry and teaching of Jesus should be so few has long seemed to call for explanation, even when all our present gospels were dated later than his day. How much more will this be the case if they are put back into the very heart of his missionary activity! Can it be that even then a Discourse Source, Mark, and perchance Matthew, were in existence and more or less widely known? Who of all the Apostolic and Christian circle might be supposed to take a livelier interest in the second gospel, which

is so obviously intended for non-Jewish readers? Assuming that it was written originally in Jerusalem, it must have been translated with little delay into Greek, if we are correct in holding that it served in this form as a source for both Matthew and Luke. And yet in all the apostle's letters there seems to be no slightest hint that he had any knowledge of written records or was at all dependent upon them. What is true of Paul in this regard holds likewise for the other New Testament writers. That such a situation presents a real difficulty cannot be questioned. At the same time we do not forget the precariousness of every argument from silence. It is possible that we are here led astray by presuppositions of our own creating and by our inclination to gauge the knowledge of the Apostle too exclusively by what has been transmitted to us in his surviving epistles. Who can say that his missionary preaching did not concern itself with the more important events of Jesus' ministry and teaching? Harnack has pointed out that if we knew Luke only through the Book of Acts, we should little dream that he was the author of a gospel revealing deepest interest in the life of Jesus and filled with evidences of a most intimate knowledge of the details of that life. We might assume rather, if we followed the method that has been adopted not infrequently in dealing with Paul, and not without disastrous results, that Luke likewise was completely out of touch with Synoptic tradition and knew hardly more of Jesus' ministry than had come to him through Christological dogmas. Would it, after all, be so necessary for Paul to appeal to written records, even though it were true that Mark and the many others of Luke's prologue were busied even then with the preparation of such narratives? His own knowledge of the facts might well seem to him equally authoritative, and with good reason, for why may not the compass of his information be extended to include everything that was accessible to these writers? Furthermore, is the reticence of Paul regarding written records any more enigmatical than that of the writers of the Patristic period? The arguments that are often advanced to explain their silence, namely, the availability of oral tradition and preference for it, will hold even more for the apostolic age. It may be urged in addition that the Apostle does make allusions to evangelical history; they are introduced in such a way as to suggest a large background

of information on the part of himself and of his readers. These considerations will probably lessen, though they may not altogether remove, the objections to the early dating of the Synoptic Gospels that arise from Paul's seeming independence of evangelical tradition.

(3) It may be asked, in the next place, is it possible that the gospel literature came to such a state of perfection in twenty-five years? Was there sufficient opportunity within this comparatively brief period for all the development that seems to lie back of the second gospel? This book is often spoken of as a first attempt which served to fix the norm that was followed by later evangelical writings, but its mastery of proportion, method and order is so complete as to lead us to inquire whether the experimental stage in such composition has not been left behind. We can understand how Papias might find Mark faulty in arrangement in comparison with either John or Matthew, but to-day we believe that the second gospel furnished the standard of order for the other records of Synoptic tradition. There is an evident intention on the part of the evangelist to maintain a general chronological sequence, in spite of the fact that he often adopts a topical arrangement in the grouping of his material. While none of the elaborate analyses of the gospel that have been worked out hitherto seem likely to win any wide acceptance, it does appear probable that we must be ready to grant the use of older sources in other parts besides chapter 13. I have in mind especially the section extending from 6:45 to 8:36, where the parallelism between the two feedings of the multitudes and the incidents immediately following in each instance is so striking that it is not easy to explain the situation unless we assume the use of duplicate narratives.

(4) Not only must a sufficient interval be provided for miscellaneous jottings of oral tradition to have developed into a carefully articulated gospel, but a considerable period is likewise required for the founding and growth of the community, or communities, outside of Palestine that should call for such a gospel. For, whatever may have been the original intention, the present Mark gives evidence of adaptation to the requirements of non-Jewish readers. Of this we have sufficient indication in the employment of the Greek language and in the editorial comments. We seem compelled to suppose that Chris-

tianity extended very rapidly in the forties and early fifties. Such indeed must have been the case if not Mark alone, but the fuller and more elaborate gospel of Luke, as well as the writings of his many predecessors, are to be assigned to the period of Paul's ministry. To our surprise it will thus be discovered that there was no lack of zeal or enterprise in providing literature for the new propaganda. The life of the churches in these years must have been richer and more varied than we have been wont to think. The Apostle to the Gentiles will not be that lonely figure that we have imagined. And if Matthew be added to the list of early narratives and be made to precede Luke, then the literary development of primitive Christianity becomes truly astonishing. Even more is this the case when Acts is put back into the same Pauline epoch and made to be a history brought up to date. It would then turn out that the major part of the New Testament books, historical and epistolary, were written before the Jewish war and the fall of Jerusalem.

So far as we have to do with Aramaic documents, it is probable that they will seem to be more in place before than after the triumph of Titus, though Wellhausen is disposed to think that a Christian community may have continued to keep its seat in the Holy City and may have lived on there in the old way, producing Aramaic traditions, even after Roman occupation. Such a postulate is not, however, a necessary factor in the theory that our Synoptic Gospels proceed from Semitic sources. Nor, again, should this theory be made to depend at all upon conclusions regarding the date of Acts. These subjects have been associated in this present address because they have chanced to be thus coupled together in recent discussions and because both have a direct and very important bearing upon the question as to when the Synoptic Gospels were written. Any difficulties, however, that may be felt about the one position are not chargeable to the other. As a matter of fact, at the present time, the claim for an early dating of Acts has by no means the same measure of certainty that we are entitled to feel regarding Mark's direct dependence upon written or oral Aramaic tradition.

(5) Many will find the most serious objection to the early dating of Acts, with all that this involves for the Synoptic writings, in the contrast between the points of view of that book

and the statements of Paul's epistles. It has not seemed necessary to elaborate this topic in the present discussion since it has received so much attention in recent critical studies of Acts. That this last named book should conceive of the Apostle's relation to the Jerusalem church and to Gentile missions in a manner so unlike his own portrayal of the facts seems explicable only on the basis of a late date and remoteness from the actual historical situation. Much the same can be affirmed regarding many of the narratives of the early chapters of Acts.

To these considerations there must be added the not infrequent indications of Luke's use of sources in his second as well as in his first treatise. All of which can be accounted for much more readily in the period following than in that preceding the fall of Jerusalem.

VI

Two topics seem to call for a brief word in closing.

Sometimes these recent theories regarding early dates for the Synoptic Gospels have been hailed as a return to tradition. If this statement were true, it would have no particular bearing on the question at issue, but as a matter of fact it misses the point. In the first place, there is no disposition to-day to return to the *methods* of tradition, and, in the second place, there is no uniform tradition to which we could return if we would. If by tradition one means the usual interpretation of Papias and Irenaeus, to the effect that all our gospels are later than 60, then recent conclusions are in conflict with tradition. No more is there a disposition to go back to the Alexandrian tradition that Matthew and Luke preceded Mark, and still less to the supposition that Mark was written at Rome in 43. There is only a return to such tradition, early or late, as chances to accord with conclusions that may be established in other ways.

The second observation that I would make is that the assertion than one's view as to the date of the gospels will in no way affect his estimate of their contents, has obvious limitations. To prove that an author is not far removed from the events that he chronicles does not, to be sure, establish the fact of his reliability. It does, however, vastly increase the likelihood that he could and would report that which was currently received in the Christian circles of his day. We cannot rightly impute to

him the radical and far reaching transformation of primitive tradition that might conceivably be possible 50 or even 30 years later, when few survived who had any immediate acquaintance with the events with which he deals and so could speak from any degree of personal knowledge. All extravagant "Tendenz" methods of criticism and interpretation will find their progress greatly hampered by an early dating of the gospels and by the evidence of their dependence upon written or oral Aramaic sources.

The chronological question is not one of primary importance in synoptic investigation, but it is one that must receive a due measure of consideration. For, in the last analysis, our estimate of the gospels is bound to be determined in no small degree by our decision as to the period from which they come. Just what is to be the outcome of the newly awakened interest in this theme is not as yet evident. Probably one result will be a lesser inclination to be content with merely restating, without examination, time-honored but inconclusive arguments. Even though we may not be prepared at present to modify our former views in any essential way, it still remains true that the earlier dates proposed are bound to receive serious consideration. The discussion of the problems that are involved in their acceptance will in any event stimulate research and thus help to a better understanding of the Apostolic Age.